

WITTGENSTEIN AND DAVIDSON ON ACTIONS: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

Enakshi Mitra

There are several philosophical issues which are usually woven around the notion of actions. Apart from the dominant question as to how actions (as contrasted with involuntary happenings) are different from, and related with, cognition, wish and will—a question which boils down to the controversy whether actions are *caused* by these mental antecedents or *justified (rationalized) atemporally*—there arises the further dispute about which of the ontological categories like particulars, universals, events, substance, etc., will be suitable to house them. From the standpoint of philosophy of language, issues like analysis of the logical form and semantics of action-words and action-sentences demand special attention. A typically semantic problem regarding the difference between reference and description comes up with regard to actions, for the same action seems to be available to several descriptions. To take an instance cited by Davidson, the same action of flipping the switch may alternatively be described as ‘driving off a bat’, ‘checking the degree of luminance’, ‘checking the functionality of the power point’, ‘illuminating the room’, ‘disturbing air molecules’, ‘alerting a prowler’, etc. The strong suggestion that it is the very same action that is intentional under some of these descriptions and unintentional under other ones stirs up some prevalent philosophical anxieties—those regarding the extensional identity of the action, the ontology of its attributes and their mutual relation—with a fresh resurgence.

In this paper, I seek to bring out the difference between the later Wittgenstein’s¹ and Davidson’s view of actions with a special focus. This will be an attempt to compare and contrast their respective approaches to the correlative notions of wish, will (intention) and actions, an issue which has customarily been categorized as ‘reason’-approach of Wittgenstein as against the ‘mental causation’ theory endorsed by Davidson. I have sought to integrate this theme with the semantic issue of the distinction

between reference and description or that between the extensionalist and intensionalist approach to actions. While in the two broad sections of this paper we deal with Davidson's theory and the Wittgensteinian critique respectively, we have concluded with a brief indication of McDowell's treatment of this cause/reason polemic phrased in terms of the non-conceptualist versus conceptualist debate—suggesting a new direction to engage with Wittgenstein's insights on action.

DAVIDSON'S THEORY OF ACTION: A BRIEF EXPOSITION

From the richly detailed corpus of Davidson's writing on actions², I focus on certain specific topics—his mental causation view of actions, his notion of agency, and his treatment of will or intention. This will also acquaint us with the exact nuances of his treatment of this distinction between reference and description (or that between extension and intension) and see how it recurs across the different aspects of his theory.

Davidson's Causal Theory of Action

To say that a person performs an action is also to say that he does it for a reason, and in so far as this reason *causes* his actions it becomes the primary reason. For Davidson R is a primary reason why an agent performed the action A under the description d when it satisfies two conditions: (1) R has to consist of a pro-attitude (desires, wants, urges, aesthetic principles, social conventions) of the agent towards the action with a certain property, and a belief (knowing, perceiving, remembering, etc.) of the agent that A under the description d has the relevant property. (2) This pair of belief and desire has to *cause* the action. (Let us call this couple of statements C1).³ Stated more cryptically this would run as: 'For an event e to be an intentional action under a description d, it must be caused by something which was a reason for doing e under d'. (We may term this as C2) Let e be the event of the agent's hands moving over the switch in a way that the latter is pressed down, and let this event be an intentional action under description d (viz. 'driving off a bat')—here the agent must have the required pro-attitude towards the general species of actions having the relevant property (viz. the property of driving away a bat) and also the belief that this particular action falls under that species. Further, as one may have the primary reason and yet refrain from doing the action, Davidson, in order to

bridge the gap between the primary reason for an action and the action itself, has to bring in the additional requirement of the former as also *causing* the latter.

This mental causation theory of action is to be appreciated against the rationalist or justificatory account.⁴ According to the latter, actions to be actions must be intelligible or describable in terms of their reason. Reason amounts to their identification, ruling out the possibility that the reason be posed as preceding and thus being separate from the action itself. As the cause of an action will necessarily antecede and, thus, be separate from the action itself, reasons are not causes. Thus this rationalist account alleges the causal-theorist as making a false split between the action and its primary reason, in so far as he projects the latter as its cause. The crux of Davidson's defence against this position is roughly as follows. Wanting to do an action *x* is multiply satisfiable, and hence, cannot logically incorporate the precise way it is to be carried out, nor can it cover the innumerable contingencies that stand in the way of its implementation. As the notions of wanting to do *x* and doing *x* are logically independent, the conceptual identity claimed by the reason-theory does not hold ground, and the logical gap has to be closed only by actual causation. Davidson will further argue that one can adopt the simple verbal trick of bridging this gap by turning the causal statement into the following analytic statement: 'The pro-attitude and the beliefs which are the causes of doing *x* in all possible worlds are the causes of doing *x*.' The artificial triviality of such exercises becomes apparent—in what for Davidson is the obvious fact—that we can very well identify our belief and desire for *x* without doing *x* itself.⁵

However, in Essay 4 'Freedom to Act'⁶ Davidson himself works out an inadequacy of C2, and goes on to build his causal theory on stronger grounds. He hits upon innovative examples that betray C2 as merely necessary and not sufficient for explaining the notion of an intentional action. He describes the situation of two mountaineers hanging on a rope in a precarious position where the action of loosening the rope by the first mountaineer will save his own life at the cost of the second. Here the event *e* is the fingers loosening on the rope, the description *d* is 'getting rid of the weight' that is supposed to turn the mentioned event into an intentional action *A*, and the agent, viz. the first mountaineer evidently has the required pro-attitude and belief about the relevant property of the action, which causes the actual event of loosening the grip and the fatal fall of the second mountaineer. Yet we cannot say that the first

mountaineer committed the action of intentionally loosening the rope to let his friend fall. Here Davidson points out that the primary reason of the action is not *the* reason but *a* reason, for the causal chain leading to the fall does not follow a straightforward track. The agent's pro-attitude and belief about the desirable property (of getting rid of the weight) is overpowered by the unnerving fear that his desire may supersede the professional norms and commitment to his friend, and finally it is this fear which actually precipitates the action. Such recalcitrant instances lead Davidson to add that the causation should be in 'the right way' and finally to incorporate the richer notion of *intention* to supplement his initial formulation. In the real course of life our pro-attitudes are often intractably entwined with and constantly overpowered by our con-attitudes which lead Davidson to observe: 'What I despair of spelling out is the way that attitudes must cause actions if they are to rationalise actions.'⁷

Agency and the Distinction between Extension and Intension

One of Davidson's stock example of floating this tension between reference and description with respect to actions is that of flipping a switch, which though extensionally the same as or numerically identical with actions as driving off a bat, checking the degree of luminance, checking the functionality of the power point, lighting the room, disturbing air molecules, alerting a prowler etc., not all these descriptions will render the action intentional. Davidson claims that while the *criterion* of agency is in the semantic sense intentional or conceptual, the *expression* of agency is extensional or referential.⁸ That is to say, the agent comes into a 'direct', or rather what Davidson will call, a 'semantically transparent contact' with actual features of the event, whether he actually represents them or not in the course of his action. On the other hand, for a third person to decide whether the agent has acted intentionally or not, the factor whether he (the agent) knows the real features of the event (which would include the features of the objects involved in the action as well as its consequences) is indispensable. Thus while the person flipping the switch expresses his agency with respect to all his knowable and unknowable consequences, while firing a gun by an agent connects his agency with the unintentional killing of another person, the criteria for describing and interpreting the action, whether in the first person or the third person are semantically opaque, they fall back on the crucial factor whether that particular

description of the event pertains to the agent's representation and intention.

Davidson further explores whether the notion of agency can be explained in terms of a person bringing about or *causing* an event in a primitive way, or to put it slightly otherwise, in terms of causing a primitive action. Interestingly Davidson does not design the notion of primitive action against those that are non-primitive. Opposing Arthur Danto's view Davidson claims that there are no basic or primitive actions that are commonly shared amongst all actions of different levels of complexity, nor can this primitive/non-primitive distinction be drawn with respect to specific actions relative to specific contexts. For Davidson, primitive actions can neither be defined as being immediately caused by brain-events or muscle-contractions, nor can they be cashed out in terms of causing secondary phases or consequences of the action. The agent might be ignorant about the physiological details, but the latter do not cause his actions, rather in doing the action the agent also causes them to obtain. Further Davidson asserts that when I do any action A by doing B (disturb air molecules by flipping the switch; kill the archbishop by checking out the trigger), actions A and B are numerically or extensionally same. It is the same action that can, like an accordion, be squeezed or stretched out in terms of its different aspects and consequences, like the same action of flipping the switch can be squeezed into the bare movements of the arms and fingers or stretched out to absorb its variant offshoots. So once the rift between primitive actions and the consequences are flattened out, we have to digest that the primitive actions are all the actions there are, for the customary notion of the so-called non-primitive actions as being mental or rather more conceptual and cerebral, accommodating various descriptions *vis a vis* the primordial non-descriptive character of the primitive actions can no longer persist. Being primitive and non-primitive are the two ways in which an action is described.⁹

Though Davidson deliberately seeks to impress this notion of extensional agency as simpler and more basic than that of intention (and intension) he is careful to note that this extensional identity of the action itself cannot be made ready for receiving alternative descriptions (i.e., descriptions pertaining to the conceivable intentions and possible consequences) unless it is clothed in a minimal descriptive load of a primary intention. Indeed how can the self-same action of one's moving one's legs in structured intervals in the forward direction, or the minimal act of flipping the switch

with one's arms, be identified except under the intention of making perambulatory movements or an intentional manipulation of the switch? In the absence of an intention (i.e. in cases where my body was forced to move in a walk-like movement by some invisible pressure, or my fingers ran over the switch involuntarily) the accordion effect is not applicable. So what makes a primitive action an *intentional* one, with respect to *some* consequences at least, needs to be answered.

Davidson on Intending

Apart from the demand that we have just noted, there are other reasons for which the notion of intention demands a special place in Davidson's scheme of actions. Davidson certainly does not want his theory of action to glide into some form of behaviourism either of Wittgensteinian or the Rylean variety. He wants his intention to figure as mental foundations of actions—and also with the further demand that they ground our actions as their *causal* antecedents and not as their *rational* basis, primarily because actions according to him are events that happen in time. At the same time he does not want to posit his intentions as pure acts of will working mysteriously in a non-deterministic model of causation as is conceived in traditional Dualism.¹⁰

Most vitally, Davidson is concerned with the notion of pure intending that may occur without practical reasoning, action or consequence. He also seems to admit this pure intending as being a detachable identity shared commonly with performed actions—the latter having a certain degree of deliberation and successful execution as an add-on feature.¹¹ Davidson is quite sensitive to the fact that most intentions are not formed, if forming an intention involves conscious deliberation and decision. Davidson thinks that the notion of intention that we need as the explanatory basis of action has to be 'broader and more neutral', it does not have the imposing character of a plunge, and yet despite its slow, subdued and gradual emergence it is an event, it is an action in so far as it is something that the agent does.

Further, the theory of mental causation of action, even in his revised formulation phrased in terms of primary reasons causing the action 'in the right way' (discussed earlier in this paper) fails to break free of a nagging circularity.¹² Obviously what Davidson implies is that the revised account falls into a dilemma: Either it fails to close the gap between primary reasons and the intended action or

closes it only at the cost of inserting the notion of intentional action into the definition—the very notion that it sets out to define. Besides, this account (of primary reason causing the action in the straightforward or right way) is not adequate to capture the notion of intention, for the purported action is not familiar or observable even to the agent himself.¹³ This leads Davidson to enrich the notion of primary reason itself into that of intending in a non-circular way that keeps clear of the notion of action and yet explains the latter.

Davidson goes on to explain the main difficulty in defining the notion of intention (rather *forming* an intention) in terms of belief and desire in the Aristotelian model of practical syllogism. We know that for Aristotle the format of practical syllogism runs as:

Any action of mine, which has xyz features (e.g. consumption of sweets), is desirable.

This action of mine has xyz features (is one of taking sweets).

Therefore, this action of taking sweets is desirable.

Aristotle said that the action itself follows as the conclusion of the syllogism.

Davidson rightly points out that on this account there remains an unbridgeable gap between the major premises and the conclusion. On the one hand, the conclusion is an evaluative judgment expressed in terms of a demonstrative reference to a particular action; the major premise on the other hand makes a broad sweep over actions only in so far as they are sweet-consuming, it does not have the power to address the specificity of each individual action which in spite of having the general feature of being sweet-consuming, has variant shades of desirability and undesirability. It is not till one is acquainted with the particular action demonstratively referred that he is able even to put up the stance of subsuming the conclusion under the major premise.

Let us take the liberty of projecting this form of practical syllogism as fundamentally different from two other types of theoretical syllogisms. First, in the stock example of theoretical syllogism like 'All men are mortal, Ram is a man, and therefore Ram is mortal', the particular presented in the subject-term of the minor premise and the conclusion are *possible* particulars, not actual ones. We may add that the referring expressions (proper names, definite descriptions, pronouns and indexicals) occurring in the subject-position of the minor premise and conclusion of theoretical

sylogisms are sometimes put to an attributive use, not a referring one.¹⁴ In a second type of theoretical syllogism however, we can put Ram as an *actual* individual (with whom we are actually acquainted) in the conclusion, and thereby subsume it under the major premise, in so far as the predication of mortality is not subjected to further conditions or viewpoints. But the conclusion of the *practical* reasoning under consideration, though may be matched with the major premise as a hind-sight, what remains as the crucial point is that in choosing to perform the relevant action I went beyond the scope of the major premise; 'my choice represented, or perhaps was, a judgment that the action itself was desirable.'¹⁵ The major premises of a practical syllogism never have a law-like character; there the general predicate of desirability is always qualified by a proviso, what Davidson terms 'prima facie' desirability. All that is warranted by such premises is the conclusion about the particular action as being desirable only under *that* respect. Davidson goes on to assert that the judgment corresponding to, or perhaps identical with, the action must be an 'all-out unconditional' judgment. The full form of this judgment will run somewhat like this: 'Any action of mine in the immediate future that has the required xy features (consumption of sweets) would be desirable, given the rest of what I believe about the immediate future'. As the exclusion of an endless set of frustrating conditions cannot be incorporated as provisions in the major premise, what is crucial for the all-out judgment is that of there being an assumption that nothing will come up to make the action (of eating sweets) undesirable or impossible. Obviously this judgment does not incorporate this condition in its own body; rather this assumption forms the very condition of our intentions. The intention 'assumes and does not contain a reference to a certain view of the future.'¹⁶ Davidson further claims that it is this special assumptive nature of the all-out judgment shared in common between pure intending and enacted intentions that despite the absence of the demonstrative, forges the required connection between the homogenized generality of the major premise and the desirability of the particular and complete action performed by the agent. Overall, this judgment is also hoped to ensure the causation of action as obtaining in the non-deviant or 'right' way.

Causation and Causal Explanation of Actions

As we have seen, the principal motivation behind Davidson's causal theory of action is the claim that no amount of cognition, however

certain it is, and no extent of desire, however strong it is, are adequate to account for the action, unless the all-important input—that of the primary reason as *causing* the action—is filled in. But Davidson is careful to note the special characteristics of this mental causation—its being holistic, normative, intentional and non-nomological. Let us briefly explain at least some of these features:

Holism: Contrary to the causal relations that obtain between physical events in an isolated fashion, the causal relations between mental states and actions are holistic. What seems to be a straightforward causal operation between a mental state and a plain physical behaviour actually spills over their purportedly specific boundaries into a holistic mesh of other beliefs and desires. To go back to our old example where we attribute the intention of illuminating the room on the basis of seemingly plain behavioural indication of turning on the switch, we just need to reshuffle the environment of the agent's preceding and succeeding behaviour, incorporate more information about the agent's wants and beliefs, to activate alternative intentions like alerting the prowler, driving a bat, checking the switch etc.. Let us engage in a more complex and imaginative example: Suppose we attribute to somebody the desire of stealing a painting of Rothko on the basis of what we think to be plain behavioural indications.¹⁷ However, if we take care to place this behaviour in a more pervasive pattern of his life, the same behaviour can be read as a move to save the painting from a foreseen risk of being stolen by another person, or muscular exercises in relation to the picture, or a play with the shadows of both the picture and his body, or rearrangement of objects in the museum or exhibition. Similarly, once we have attributed a desire for stealing, his subsequent act of not taking it, even if provided with ample opportunities, does not conclusively warrant the withdrawal of that previously attributed desire. That desire may have been overpowered by another desire for preserving an honest reputation, or been delicately adjusted to an exaggeration of risk-factors, etc. 'There is no assigning beliefs to a person one by one on the basis of his verbal behaviour, his choices, or other local signs no matter how plain and evident, for we make sense of particular beliefs only as they cohere with other beliefs, with preferences, with intentions, hopes, fears, expectations and the rest.'¹⁸

Intension, Causality and Causal Explanation: Davidson rephrases his special view of mental causation in terms of a distinction he draws

between *events* as *particulars*, i.e., as *referentially transparent* entities, and *actions* as *events described* in one way or other. For Davidson the mental and the physical are two aspects of the same event, a relation which turns out to be one of ‘token-identity’, independent of any type or property binding the two. Events being neutral bits of reality, instantiate laws only when described in certain ways and not in others. *Causality* and identity obtain between individual events no matter how they are described. *Causal explanation* on the other hand falls back upon laws or at least on the specific descriptions that the events receive in exclusion of other options. Consider the statement ‘The explosion on 21 July 1990 in Kolkata caused the collapse of the Howrah Bridge’. If that explosion happens to be the loudest thing on that day then we can safely substitute the phrase ‘the explosion in ...’ with ‘the loudest thing...’ without altering the truth-value of the original statement of causality. Evidently this *Interchangeability Salva Veritate* is possible due to the extensional character of causality and identity, whereas causal explanation (whether nomological or not) will obviously be referentially opaque, putting a particular screen of description between our language and the event. So for Davidson a mental causation does not hold in the sense of physical causation, for while the latter obtains between non-descriptive events, the former *qua* explanation or rationalization, though non-nomological, relate to actions only in so far as they are described or categorized in terms of specific intentions.¹⁹

Mental Causation Being Non-Nomological: We have already noted that the indeterminate and the intractable way in which an action meshes up in a web precludes a nomological relation between reason and action. Overall, Davidson views causation as operating in a more relaxed manner allowing a spectrum of possible degrees of causal explanation. Psycho-physical and psychological relations obtain as generalizations that are distinct from laws. To attribute an agent (the mountaineer or the Rothko-coveter) a belief and desire in favour of their action, or another person the desire to crush a snail, is not to engage in a law-like prediction, for the simple reason that such beliefs and desires are invaded by a multitude of other cognitions and emotions. To attribute an agent such beliefs and desires in favour of an action is to attribute him a mere tendency to act in a certain way in a contra-factual situation. This analysis relieves mental causation from the threat of counter-examples and the burden of nomological prediction while supplying it with the

required freedom or under-determination that is characteristic of voluntary actions.

Placing Davidson's Theory of Action within his Theory of Meaning

We can round off this account with a brief indication of the extent to which Davidson's theory of action can be synthesized with his general theory of meaning. Can the action-sentences of our natural language be interpreted in the model of deducing T-theorems from certain extensional axioms and rules of inference of first order predicate-logic along with the tool of recursive semantics?²⁰ Davidson's format of T-sentences illustrated in terms of his standard example of flipping the switch will read as:

'Rajiv flips the switch' if Rajiv flips the switch. (A)

An attempted understanding of the theory of interpretation of actions as an integral part of his general theory of meaning will have to focus on the following points:

(a) While events are bare particulars actions as intentionally loaded events do not form a part of the extensional entities of the world. Hence one cannot formulate the axioms for a theory of interpreting actions in terms of ascribing extensions to action-words.

(b) Actions are particulars and their adverbial modifiers are simply relations that they (actions) pass into and pass out without compromising their original semantic identity.

The logical form of action-sentences, for instance of 'Rajiv flips the switch cautiously' will be:

$Ee ((\text{Flips the switch (Rajiv, } e)) \text{ and } (\text{Cautious (} e \text{)})) (B)$ where e is an individual variable ranging over events.²¹

From (B) one can deduce both conjuncts separately. However Davidson is cautious to note that a co-extensive (but *not co-intensive*) substitution of the action-phrase in (B) say by the phrase 'Drives off the bat' will not preserve its truth-value. Similar analysis will apply *a fortiori* to the adverb 'intentional'.²²

(c) The crucial answer to the question as to how the T-sentences give interpretations of the action-sentences framed in object-language, we know that Davidson's response will come in terms of holism and indeterminacy. Each T-theorem will be deduced not in isolation but in a network of other T-theorems. One cannot confront

a single belief, a singly uttered sentence, or an action performed in isolation, and *then* goes on to work out the specific pattern of causal relation in which it enters with other beliefs. Thus, reference is achieved in a holistic manner, starting with the full sentences, and not in the piecemeal fashion of the causal theories of reference. And as we have seen, in the same circumstances there will be several non-synonymous sentences in the meta-language, all of which are different interpretations of the same sentence in object-language. Both the axioms as well as the statements about beliefs and desires in this theory are theoretical constructs, on whose basis the theorems are deduced along with the pre-supposition of a common basis of rationality. That is to say, our evidence of accepting a particular truth-condition for an action-sentence must be based on a shared stock of rational principles that connect belief, desire and action in a way that is universal for all humankind.²³

DAVIDSON AND WITTGENSTEIN: DISTANCE BEYOND PROXIMITY

Davidson's style of philosophizing shows a temperament that is fairly sensitive to the overwhelming irregularities and the prodigal variety of the worldly phenomena, as well as the intractable difficulties of its detail that make it extremely difficult to put them under theoretical explanations, to make neat categories of mind and body, or to draw neat quantitative boundaries between different objects and events. Yet his highly observant spirit always strives to bring these anomalies under control, with a steadfast conviction that beyond this superficial chaos lies the fine-grained world of structured regularity. While he ensures that the T-sentences are interpreted in a holistic background of other T-sentences, his universal prescription of charity is not sensitive to the Wittgensteinian insights about the inherent indeterminacy of all purported foundations of language—be it inner or outer extension, beliefs or assumptions, verbal rules or principles. For Wittgenstein, all proposed foundations of our language are ruptured internally, i.e., even *within* a specific holistic network. His way of exploring the anomalous and chaotic extravaganza is not to recoil into foundations or originary sources, not to substitute global foundations with local ones, but to dissipate all supposedly hidden depths to an open expanse of uses and behaviours, to dissolve all explanations into unfounded actions.

Working out Wittgenstein's Critique of Davidson's Mental Causation

Wittgenstein's resistance against the causal theory of action principally consists in the insight that no state of intention or volition can be segregated from an action, from which the action can be said to follow as an effect. This needs to be appreciated against the backdrop of his reflections on the so-called mental concepts in general. He points out that a study of phenomena like seeing, hearing, thinking, expecting, hoping, believing, willing etc. invites a question of criterion, viz. what external behaviours one must exhibit to be in that state. In the first place, hopes, expectations cannot be given an insular phenomenological quality of the present—their content spills over to imbibe the precedents and consequents of the situation (*Philosophical Investigations* (Henceforth *PI*) 584).²⁴ Suppose the entire morning I am hoping that N.N. will come and bring me some money—if one minute is cut off from this context 'will it not be hope?' The question can be answered sensibly only if we realize that whether we cut off a chunk of one minute or five hours from the stretch, hoping cannot preserve a purely mental status if the words do not belong to the language-game, i.e. if the 'feeling' of hope is displaced from the entire institution of money-lending in which it is situated. Secondly, the diverse cases of hoping, expecting, intending does not share a common self-identical character in the shape of a special mental undertone that can be retrieved through introspection. To dissipate such myths Wittgenstein takes to his characteristic style of actual survey of cases where these terms are used (*PI* 588). (i) I am revoking my decision to leave tomorrow. (ii) Your arguments do not convince me, I stick to my previous decision. (iii) Asked how long are you going to stay I say 'Tomorrow my holiday ends'. (iv) At the end of a quarrel I say, 'Okay I decide to leave tomorrow'. There is no characteristic experience of 'tending towards something' underlying all these diverse phenomena. Intention to say something does not consist in opening one's mouth, drawing one's breath and letting it out again, for such things can happen in a completely different situation to feed a completely different concept. (*PI* 591) On the whole the dimension of 'depth' in the cases of genuine intentions as contrasted to faked ones consist in a flattening out of this depth in painstaking descriptions of humdrum uses (*PI* 594).

It is interesting to note Davidson's response to similar arguments raised by Melden against the causal theory of action. Davidson observes that mental causation of actions does not require either 'a

stab, a qualm, a prick or a quiver, a mysterious prod of conscience or act of the will',²⁵ nor a mental event which is common or peculiar to a particular kind of action, say the driver raising his arm with the purpose of signaling.²⁶ For Davidson what is required is a mental event at some moment before the action, something that the driver saw before he raised his arm. Besides, Davidson argues that in complicated actions like driving or swimming it is not a single event but a sequence of activities that bears the stamp of its mental causation—'...there are more or less fixed purposes, standards, desires, and habits that give direction and form to the entire enterprise, and there is the continuing input of information ...in terms of which we regulate and adjust our actions.'²⁷ Such responses show that Davidson is far from appreciating the purported mental phenomena—like the sudden visual observation of the driver, or the standards, purposes, and the style of continuous reception of inputs—as inextricably entwined with, and not antecedent to, a rich corpus of behaviours (*PI* 242-315).

Further, though Davidson admits verbal uses as a kind of action, he thinks it to be substantially different from the non-verbal ones. For Wittgenstein on the other hand, they blend into a single continuum very much in the same way that pain-language becomes a sophisticated extension of pain-behaviour. When a child hurts himself and cries out in pain, we teach him new pain-behaviours—e.g., exclamations like 'oh!' 'ouch', putting his hands on the sore place; and later, pain-languages like 'stubbing one's toes', 'itching', 'tooth-ache' etc. Teaching pain-language is teaching him a new kind of pain-behaviour, and none of these behaviours (linguistic and non-linguistic) are labels or signboard-indicators for his internal and private pain-sensations. Learning and teaching a new cluster of pain-behaviours (linguistic and non-linguistic) is not the end of language game, but rather its beginning. It is the beginning of a process of forming and expanding the concept of pain along the transitional links of family-resemblances. Actions for Wittgenstein are not the consequence of language, nor are passively represented in the same; rather language in general is an extension of the consensus of actions, of forms of life, in the same manner as pain-language in an extension of pain-behaviour.

This vital distinction between the two philosophers naturally casts a far-reaching impact on various aspects of their views on action, particularly with respect to will or intention. We have already noted that both of them dismissed the dualistic assumption of a special state of will or intention and treated it as an action that may stop

short of generating further actions as in the case of pure intending. However, while Wittgenstein stretches out all the separate links of belief, desire and action into a seamless complex, Davidson uses his notion of intending as a missing link in his mechanism of explaining actions. The foundationalist commitments of Davidson convinces him of a state of intention that lies beneath the riotous flow of conflicting beliefs and desires, holding the key to all the questions as to why we act as we act, and why we intend as we intend. Now how will Wittgenstein respond to Davidson's operation of tracking down a subdued assumption of an all-out judgment underlying our intentions? To put it more precisely, how will Wittgenstein react to the way Davidson opens up a gap between flat generality of the major premise of a practical syllogism and the particularity of the conclusion, only to close it up with the all-out judgment? For Wittgenstein, once an action-theory creates a gap in this manner, it refuses to be closed up in the prescribed way. The indeterminacy of the major premise does not simply consist in its glossing over several species or aspects of desirability, and thereby failing to capture the specific aspect of the particular action referred to in the conclusion. For Wittgenstein, each of these species or aspects will be internally ruptured precluding an entailment even when the aspects of desirability are specified in the major premise. For one thing, the semantic indeterminacy of each of the words with which the premises and the conclusion are coined, cannot be foreclosed by rules. For another thing, the proper names or demonstratives in the minor premise do not cut out an immaculate individual—be it an individual man or animal or an event-action—either in a conceptual or a non-conceptual manner. Both individual as well as conceptual identification are in this sense non-foundational and reduce to actions. In other words, the major premises of both theoretical and practical syllogisms, in their predicative content as well their range of individual variables, flesh out bit by bit, through each derivation of a conclusion.²⁸

Davidson asserted that the judgment 'that corresponds to, or is perhaps identical with the action' must be an all-out unconditional judgment. The verbal expression of such a judgment will be 'This action is desirable.'²⁹ Here interestingly Davidson is equating judgment with action, and since he distinguishes the judgment from its verbal form, we may conclude that for Davidson this judgment is a mental action. Now Davidson's way of refuting Dualism by forging a relation of token-identity between physical and mental events gets bogged down with a neat scaffolding of definite spatio-temporal

identities, missing out the significance of their inter-penetration. In this sense it is doubtful as to what extent Davidson appreciates that manipulating verbal symbols, or running images sequentially, or combining them with one another—spill out of their supposedly mental content into indeterminate motley of uses and behaviours. Similarly what makes an action a typically physical event is not a neatly detachable space-time eventuality, but the way it overflows its prescribed boundaries to what is thought to be exclusively mental - the silent speech, images, feelings etc. All these Wittgensteinian insights will have their repercussion on the Davidsonian ontology of intention, challenging its pre-verbal or mental status as well as the semantic transparency of its verbal clothing, showing them to be inoperative even *within* a system.³⁰

Davidson seems to oscillate between two positions on the nature of intending – on the one hand he appreciates that the ‘all-out judgment corresponds to, or perhaps is identical with the action’,³¹ while at the same time he characterizes the intentional action and intending as two concepts which need to be linked by the said judgment.³² And in this connection his theory of intention may be frustrated by a substantial drawback. If the intention or the all-out judgment is identical with the action then it cannot *cause* the latter. In that case Davidson has either to abandon his causal theory of action or has to admit that it is the prima facie judgments that cause the all-out ones. Evnine points out an interesting problem pertaining to the possible mechanism of this causation.³³ All prima facie judgments, whether on desirability or undesirability of the action, even if compared and computed as regards their relative weightage, will at most generate another prima facie judgment on desirability and never an all-out judgment. This yawning chasm between the mental cause and the effected action that persists in Davidson’s scheme may push it against the intentional character of mental causation that is so vital to his action-theory. Causation of an action will lose its essential reference to the *representation* of the desirable/undesirable features and aspects of the action by the agent, it will lapse into a brute relation of mere causality between the unknown physical correlate of desire and belief on the one hand and physical movement on the other.

Further, Wittgenstein’s critique of will exposes its traditional notion as a counterpart of the Fregean sense. In the model of sense catching the reference, the will is conceived as fixing the exact point on which to catch hold of the action. We may venture to suggest that Davidson’s all-out judgment figures somewhat as an

intermediary sense, with its generality chiseled down to catch hold of the particular action, even when the latter is absent (as in the case of pure intending), along with which the required assumption, viz. that of the absence of all invalidating circumstances is woven in. Thus it also has an interesting similarity with the Strawsonian mechanism of reference—where the referent is acquired by *presupposing*, and not *stating* its unique existence.³⁴ With Davidson's theory, we find that the reference to a particular action under the required description is achieved by the assumption of its blending with generality, or rather the assumption of the generality thinning down to the individual action with the aid of negating the invalidating circumstances. All theories of meaning or action that invoke an intermediary to connect words with the world or wish with the action—viz. the sense or intention, respectively—will fall into an endless exercise of interpretations of interpretations of interpretations...in their vain attempt to justify the putative self-interpretive character of the intermediary. Davidson's theory of action too has a strong tendency to lapse into the same pitfall.

We can use a picturesque analogy given by Wittgenstein to show how the official doctrine of dualism as well as Davidson's treatment of will or intention suffers from the same folly. Both look upon causation in the model of the working of a machine and envisages the failure of causal nexus of the wish, will and action only in one way: As they cannot identify an effective mechanism connecting the parts of the machine, i.e., since they cannot locate the apparatus through which the wish links up to the will or the will links up to the action, they declare the failure of the deterministic causal narrative on that account. For Wittgenstein on the other hand, the causal narrative of the will fails because the causal nexus fails in another way, viz. because the machine-parts mesh into each other or because the cog wheels mesh with what they have to mesh. In the similar fashion the wish meshes with the will and will with the action. This is what Wittgenstein states explicitly when he says that willing, if it is to be distinguished from wishing, cannot stop short of the action itself. Trying, attempting, making an effort are a plethora of activities (*PI* 613-615). While Davidson openly claims that we can know our wishes and desires independent of our action, for Wittgenstein it is the certainty of the statement and action that is the criterion of there being a previous thought (*PI* 633). Feeling is not the criterion for determining actions; rather the action, the space and the objects are the criteria for determining the feeling (*PI* 625-626). We do not perceive mechanical motions, we perceive

what the agents do *in terms* of their wants and beliefs. Just as we look at a cat when it stalks bird, or a beast when it wants to escape (*PI* 647), similarly we see the pedestrian step aside to let a vehicle pass, we see a child observing a bird climb on a chair to get a better view of it.

Wittgenstein further argues that the thought or intention of saying something is like a brief or incomplete note, and action is like following out that brief note. It is not that there are several interpretations of that brief note and I choose one line of interpretation in my action. On a later occasion I just remember what my action was, I do not remember my choosing one alternative among others. It is straightforwardly remembering my intention, what I was going to say. This clearly shows the absurdity of splitting the intentions and actions (*PI* 634).

Wittgenstein's observations about intention being like brief (incomplete) notes or a snapshot with incomplete details (*PI* 635-637) can be fruitfully compared with his notion of a rule being like a 'short bit of handrail'. As there *is nothing* beyond the handrail, and there *isn't nothing* beyond the handrail,³⁵ similarly the incomplete details of the snapshot-like intention is neither irrelevant nor relevant. It is not irrelevant in the sense that a crow crowing in the background of my performing an action is irrelevant; it is not relevant in the sense that the action was encapsulated in that snapshot. Using the statement of one's intention as a way of filling out the background of an action is a regressive exercise; it is not a forward movement from the prior causal antecedent to the subsequent effect. Had Davidson's all-out judgment not been invested with a positive (though revisable) content, and had it not been pulled back one step short of the action, it could have been treated on par with this notion. Wittgenstein emphasizes that this incomplete and scanty snapshot cannot by itself account for actions, nor should one try to design a complete story (in the shape of the cause or reason), cast it into a neat boundary and make it stop before the action itself (*PI* 638). One has to take the entire background where the wish, opinion, intention and action are blended in an indissoluble whole. The ontology of action does not involve the temporal split of causality, or the logical split between wish, will and action in the model of entailment. This continuum should not be conceived in a fashion where several thoughts tie up in a chain, for this will generate further questions whether these ties are separate thoughts or feelings too, in the same manner as each link invoked to tie up the word with reality only invokes a further link.³⁶

Wittgenstein's observations that 'one is unable to show such connexions, perhaps that comes later' (*PI* 639), may be taken as suggesting a hindsight, provided we do not let it lapse into the model of a logical system. Wittgenstein rounds up his discussion on will with the explicit statement that any proposed foundation—a verbal statement or a non-verbal intention – underdetermines the action (*PI* 641).

Action and the Sense/Reference Conundrum: Inter alia Cause-Reason Polemics

We may initially tune up to Wittgenstein's take on the issue of reference and description before we can appreciate how the difference between his and Davidson's respective approaches to this matter distanced their views on action. The crux of Wittgenstein's contention on the issue of reference and description comes in the shape of his critique of the Augustinian model of language. The Augustinians think that every word—proper name, common noun, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc.—refers to a static, readily available entity, while the function of descriptions or sentences is simply to combine these references in a variety of permissible ways. Thinking in this way stands on a par with equating each lever of a locomotive - the light-switch, crank, door-handle, brake—with their external projections jutting out from different positions and all looking alike (*PI* 4). For Wittgenstein, the special character of a referring game consists not in pinning down pre-descriptive logical atoms, but in putting up a preparatory stance of a discourse, projecting an object with a non-relational, isolated and solitary character with an apparently indivisible identity, playing down its internal complexity and relations with other objects. Putting pieces on the board before playing any real moves (*PI* 47), a builder calling out the words "slab", "pillar", "block", "beam" and his assistant bringing the relevant material (*PI* 2), a person being trained to utter different noises in response to different colour-samples (*PI* p. 187) are cited as illustrations. On the other hand, tracking down the levers in their inextricable modes of connection with other parts of the cabin, delivering actual moves of the game, absorbing the building blocks in the full-fledged process of construction, distributing the sound-labels of colour-samples in time and space, will be the corresponding descriptive games. With regard to actions we can surely conceive the following games (in the analogy of illustrations given above): The trainer calls out 'Walk'/'Walking',

‘Lie’/‘Lying’, ‘Jump’/‘Jumping’ and the learner responds either by actually performing, or drawing the picture or recalling an image of the appropriate action, or even uttering specific noises allotted to different sample-pictures of standard actions. The corresponding descriptive games will be exercises of recasting actions in terms of their phases or narrating internal details, taking note of the duration of a particular action, comparing different actions in terms of their respective temporal orders, or in terms of their respective configuration of limbs, and so on.

Wittgenstein points out that the basic flaw in the Augustinian model consists in conceiving the relation between reference and description in terms of pre-given chunks and their passive assortment. Now reference is no doubt a simple preparatory move in contrast to description. But on a close analysis, these games of putting the pieces on board, the builder’s exercise, or uttering a special noise for a specific action-sample—in so far as they have no tendency to move to the actual steps of playing, or the intricate stages of construction, or distributing them in space and time—cannot even be called simpler games in any sense. The simplicity of these so-called simple moves can only be appreciated in so far as they do not remain as truncated fragments but are seen as incorporated into the full-fledged games. And the way the simple is incorporated into the complex, or reference is incorporated into description is obviously not through a passive and linear assortment but in a dialectical interplay of an extremely intractable nature.

With this prelude we can go on to examine how Wittgenstein’s view of reference seeks to purge off all vestiges of foundation—how it breaks forth all ‘isms’ in Davidson’s holism, how it de-stabilizes all agreements underlying Davidson’s indeterminacies, how it would rupture all identities that either play the role of intra-linguistic justifiers or extra-linguistic constraints of actions.

Davidson’s notion of the extensional character of a self-same action *vis a vis* the intensional mediation of agency and intention seems to be confusing. Despite of refuting Danto’s basic actions (posed as counterparts of logical atoms of language) he seems to be labouring under a faulty assumption of an action being the self-same referent invested with a uniquely basic or primary intention prior to secondary ones. Is walking more primary than making a linear pattern on the ground, testing the density of the soil at regular intervals in the forward movement, feeling the heart-beat when one takes forward steps, preventing oneself from a sequence of falling, testing the comfort-quality one’s shoes, etc. etc.? How can

Davidson claim that it is *one* action in terms of a primary intention while the variance of descriptions only pertains to alternative aspects or consequences? Sneddor³⁷ also observes that Davidson could only dissolve the basic/non-basic distinction at the cost of a prior individuation of actions in terms of primitive and non-primitive. In the same vein he (Davidson) seems to commit himself to the minimal semantic fact *given* to a radical interpreter—the fact of the alien interpreter uttering phonemes and/or moving his limbs with the intention of making these marks and movements go *beyond* themselves. It is indeed notable that both Wittgenstein and Davidson desist from the absurd skepticism of Dualism—the absurd proposal that we as interpreters of others' actions start with purely mechanical or robotic movements, to which we adjoin beliefs, desires and other mental states. But the crucial difference between these two philosophers begins to emerge as soon as we realize that for Wittgenstein there cannot be anything like a semantic primitive posing as the starting point of all alternative descriptions, or rather as the neat gateway for entering into the holistic mesh of actions, desires and beliefs. Without this entry-point it makes no sense for Davidson to situate the agent in a *causal* network, for the action as an effect or consequent requires a separate spatio-temporal identity for itself. This separability is also demanded by the principles of radical interpretation which claim both the speaker and hearer to be situated in the same causal and logical network, sharing a common stock of logical and non-logical beliefs connected through universal principles. For Wittgenstein, this putative entry-point is already absorbed into the mesh; there is no neat physical movement of the interpreter with a clean starting and end-point for the interpreter to lay his hands on.

For Wittgenstein, the polemics about actions being caused by antecedent reasons or being *atemporally* justified, and the further dispute whether an action has an extensional identity over and above its intensional aspects, is not so much an ontological issue; it is rather the difference between two language-games played with respect to action-words. First, we need to appreciate that like all other cases, causal language-games too are sophisticated extensions of our instinctive behaviours. Wittgenstein mentions some proto-typical occasions from which our causal expressions take off—collision of billiard balls, pulling a string (traction), clock-works which combine both collisions and tractions, human reactions on being hit physically or emotionally, and lastly, occasions of Humean succession. It is important to realize that these events do not contain the real essence

of causation which we passively represent in our cognition, to be further expressible in language and to be followed up by suitable actions. On the contrary all these expressions like ‘collision’, ‘impact’, generation, ‘action and reaction’, ‘tit for tat’, ‘you hit me so I hit back’, ‘so’, ‘therefore’ etc. are shaped by our spontaneous actions. While both the causal paradigm and the reason-paradigm are designed to link things and events together, they are, as we have already noted, vitally different in so far as the cause and the *effect* are mutually external, while the *reason* and the *reasoned* are virtually identical, allowing themselves to be read off from one another.³⁸

This insight that the difference between cause and reason are *enacted* in our behaviours should pave the way to appreciate how actions themselves may be framed in two different ways by the causal paradigm and the reason-paradigm respectively. Causal paradigm takes up the stance of describing the actual process or mechanism through which an action is generated stage by stage, while the ‘reason’- account is interested in turning this mechanism into a path, where the process and the result are engulfed in a circular equivalence³⁹. To give a simple illustration: A shows a colour-sample to B, defines it as ‘red’, and later orders B to paint a red patch. B’s action of painting a red patch exactly like the sample will be amenable to two accounts. The causal account will run somewhat as follows: I am shown a colour-sample, the word ‘red’ was pronounced in such and such a tone, after some time when the order to paint red was uttered, the image of ‘red’ came to my mind, (or then I experienced an adrenaline rush), whenever I experience that I paint a red patch, etc. A reasoned account of this action will be: ‘I was ordered to paint a red patch according to this colour-sample and so I adopted the colour and shape exactly similar to the sample.’⁴⁰ It is important to note that the causal paradigm puts up the stance of an extensionalist narration trailing behind the real process through which the action comes into being, making no effort to invoke any of its feature as *represented* or *judged* by the agent as showing him a *way* or a *rule* for performing the relevant action. Even the introduction of the mental image leaves out the crucial factor of the image being judged as corresponding to the word ‘red’ given in the ostensive definition as well as in the order, or being seen to be relevantly similar to the colour of the given sample. Obviously all the gaps in the mechanism—ignorance about some links, forgetting or mis-describing them, a rectification made by a third person—are integral to this causal paradigm of describing actions. On the other hand, since the ‘reason’- account absorbs the

reason into the action itself in a single circle; there remains no possibility of an epistemological gap between the agent and the reason of his action. Further the distinction between the extensionalist and intensionalist approach to actions is not constrained by an external ontology of events and its internal representations; rather the purported externality and internality are internal to the language-game.

In the light of the above clarification we can handle the apparently recalcitrant incidence of epistemological gaps between the agent and the cause of his actions, commonly encountered in our ordinary uses. Indeed Davidson in order to fortify his causal theory claimed that on occasions of conflicting motives one may be wrong about identifying the correct one and thus mis-describe one's actions. Thus, when one has two reasons for poisoning his friend Charles—either saving his pain or to get him out of the way—he may err about the real reason.⁴¹ Mr X who prefers to spend more time with his beautiful lady-friend than his wife, may describe this action as an effort of sympathetic counseling, while as a matter of fact it is the sense of importance and feminine appreciation he gets from his lady-friend that figures as his actual motivation. Now Wittgenstein will point out that when we talk about the agent's missing, mis-representing or mis-describing the real cause behind his actions, such claims virtually amount to the mis-representation or mis-description of his entire pattern of wants, intentions and movements; one cannot have an epistemological gap with the pure mental antecedents of his actions while retaining the actions themselves as brute physical effects. When an agent oscillates between several options as possible causes of his actions, he is actually oscillating between different actions with different descriptonal identities. Often the purported cases of mis-apprehensions or mis-descriptions of real intentions are actually cases of missing out the details, inability to fill up the backdrop of the action with rich minutiae, or amount to recasting the action by shuffling its background and foreground etc. Thus, the psycho-analytic interventions cannot meaningfully claim to haul up the hidden cause of an action from the sub-conscious, for the simple reason that the success of analysis is supposed to be shown by the agent agreeing to the detection, a phenomenon that does not tally with the exercise of formulating hypothesis, which is an integral part of the causal account. '[T]he investigation of reason entails as an essential part one's agreement with it, whereas the investigation of a cause is carried out experimentally.'⁴² This disposes of Davidson's theory of

mental causation of actions in so far as it is seen to involve confusion between two language-games.

Barring certain obvious restrictions (like an action plainly going against the agent's report, his claim being insincere etc.) the verbal explanation of a non-verbal action is an extension or enrichment of the latter, not a verbal trail of an antecedent event. While one can readily appreciate that an explanation of a verbal utterance is a way of paraphrasing it, it is rather challenging to digest the verbal explanation of a non-verbal action as forging a neat and indissoluble whole with the latter. Schroeder gives an example: A throwing snowball on B's window for two consecutive times in order to get his attention, where the second act which defines and jells up with the first act is actually comparable to the verbal explanation of the first act.⁴³ The question is not one of explaining a language-game by means of our experience, but of noting a language-game (*PI* 665). Similarly the psycho-analytic exercise of hauling up hidden motives from the sub-conscious is virtually to equip oneself (both the analyst and his patient) with a 'means of representing' the action, shaping up its referential identity as a point of departure.⁴⁴ This insight cannot be accommodated in Davidson's scheme of mental causation.

This referential identity, as we have already noted, is not an isolable datum of action to serve as the entry-point into the mesh of belief, desire and physical movements. And this virtually amounts to saying that the references of action-words flesh out bit by bit through each move of the narrative, through each description of the various facets. This phenomenon of what we call the external and internal rupture of reference may require further explanation. We shall follow Wittgenstein's own illustrations of other expressions—other parts of speech like nouns, adjectives, etc.—to extend the same mode of analysis to the action-words. To take a simple example—seen from one standpoint, the simple components of a chessboard are each of the 64 squares, while from a different standpoint, its components may be said to be colours black and white and the schema of squares (*PI* 47). While this external rupture of a mode of reference is unanimously accepted as the standard reading of later Wittgenstein, what is not often appreciated is that *within* each language-game or each mode of reference-description interplay the reference does not precede but stretches out bit by bit through each description. Of course one may ask, shouldn't each of the 32 black squares and 32 white squares be given as immaculate units before one can undertake their combination?

Shouldn't the schema of squares be given as a neat framework before it can start taking in the colours to fill its empty slots? To address the second example first—the identity of the schema, as to what constitutes its outer frame, what constitutes its slots, what constitutes the colour of the frame itself as different from the filling colours, progressively unfold through each move of filling out the frame. Similarly what constitutes the boundary-line of each square, what constitutes the exact extent of its third dimension, only fleshes out through each cut of its being re-adjusted and re-shaped in the process of being combined with other squares. If we appreciate this internal rupture of reference with respect to the linguistic actions we may readily extend this insight to non-linguistic actions as well. To say that it is the same basic intention or description (of making linear movements with one's legs) that receives alternative descriptions one needs to be careful that this basic description attains its basicness only in relation to its being enriched in each of the alternative modes of configuration or in its thickening out into other descriptions. The basic description (linear movements of the legs) can well up to the non-basic descriptions (testing density of earth, making patterns etc.) only through being absorbed in the whole at every stage, and not through a passive and linear combination.

Davidson makes the further mistake of straining out a brute physical event—commonly shared by and independent of all descriptions of the action. What seems to be the single physical event underlying an action of walking can be read as some subtle atmospheric factors constraining one to move his limbs in such and such ways, or presence and absence of gravity alternating in succession to generate the walk-like movement. Or it may well be a fragment of a much expansive event, viz. concerted operations of different persons in different positions, related by electric signals, where each person is receiving remote signals by making matching movements of the body in a seemingly ambulatory structure. Thus, what seemed to a neat and independent physical event of leg-movements is actually an arbitrary bit cut out at random; it does not even cover a phase of the action of a single participant in the entire operation. In both these examples the so-called common event seemingly served on a platter breaks up into numerically distinct ones having different quantitative boundaries. Each time we seek to extract a neutral physical event commonly shared by and prior to all intensional descriptions, this putative exercise of cutting up a bare physical identity turns out to be a fabricated operation to match the subsequent descriptions. To put it more explicitly, to demonstrate

the applicability of Davidson's theory of extension versus intension to various actions we strained ourselves to concoct apparently pre-descriptive or neutral referents like movement of legs in the forward direction, downward movement of the fingers on the switch, etc.; while what we actually did was to devise a cyclic enclosure between reference and description. The bare physical event and its embellishments were not genuine progressions from simple to complex, but were designed in mutual alliance – the putatively bare reference was thickened out into descriptions and the latter in their turn reverted to their pre-descriptive counterparts. Following Wittgenstein, we can compare this with the process of fashioning a white beam of light into a cycle of dispersal and reversal (of itself and its seven components) through the mechanism of crossing prisms.⁴⁵

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Both Wittgenstein and Davidson resist the causal and atomic theories of reference to come up with an apparently common claim: One cannot interpret a seemingly uninterrupted noise or physical movement unless one already enfolded it in a conceptual network. However, Davidson fails to appreciate the internal rupture of these networks and doggedly retains an identity that sticks out as a doorway to these.

Besides in his scheme, though actions themselves are caused intensionally or conceptually, both first person agency and third person interpretation of actions is sparked off—causally and non-conceptually—by an external reality, i.e. physical objects and the bare events or particulars. The main folly of this theory, as pointed out by McDowell,⁴⁶ is that the freedom or autonomy generally attributed to voluntary actions, description or conceptual operations will lose its sense—our actions and conceptions will virtually turn into a free spinning wheel rotating in a vacuum. McDowell further explains that this theory labours under an unhealthy dichotomy—that between sensibility and concepts, nature and norms. Sensing or being acted upon by the world falls within the realm of a primal nature, while concepts have a *sui generis* or spontaneous character that falls outside. The capacity to move our arms falls within the realm of our receptive nature, and the *sui generis* spontaneity involved in the intention to move the arm carves out an exclusive realm for itself. Rephrased in Kantian terms, this theory commits the blunder of not realizing that intentions without overt activity are empty, and

the mere movements of limbs without concepts are blind happenings, not expressions of agency. McDowell holds that Wittgenstein finds out an ingenious route out of this dichotomy—by showing how the way our nature (sensibility) embeds reason or concepts itself becomes our second nature, although these natural conceptual exercises cannot be formulated in terms of laws. At the same time in our conceptual operations we do not have to step out of our natural kind and become non-natural. Whether McDowell's account constitutes the best reading of Wittgenstein in terms of doing justice to the radical extent of his anti-foundationalism is a matter that goes beyond the scope of the present paper.

NOTES

1. Henceforth all references to Wittgenstein will be to the later Wittgenstein only.
2. Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.
4. Both A. I. Melden and the later Wittgenstein will fall under the broad category of reason-theory. This paper however cannot afford the space for the internal differences between these two philosophers.
5. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Essay 1.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Davidson, 'Agency' in *Essays on Actions and Events*.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
12. *Ibid.*, footnote 3 of p. 87.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.
14. Since we borrow the distinction between referring use and attributive use of definite description from Strawson, we also need to add that it is in special second-level contexts like teaching logic, giving examples of syllogisms, teaching the use of 'therefore' that we can claim the use of the subject-term as attributive. For a clarification of the above distinction, see P. F. Strawson, 'On Referring' in R. R. Ammerman (ed.), *Classics of Analytic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994).
15. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, p. 97.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
17. I have taken this example from Simon Evnine, *Donald Davidson* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), Chapter I, pp. 15-16.
18. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, p. 221. This holistic theory of causation is quite consonant with Quine's seminal critique of empiricism. Quine claimed that any sensory stimulation can be matched with any sentence provided we make necessary adjustments in the total scheme of beliefs. See W. V. O. Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' in R. R. Ammerman (ed.), *Classics of Analytic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994). Similarly, any behaviour can be matched with any intention provided we effect a compensatory reshuffle in the entire pattern of beliefs and desires of the agent.

19. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Essay 7.
20. Davidson's theory of meaning is mainly presented in 'Truth and Meaning' in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
21. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Essay 6, also 8 and 9 ,
22. One should specially refer to Davidson's analysis of adverbs in 'Adverbs of Action', in B. Vermazen and M. Hintikka (eds), *Essays on Davidson: Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp 230-41. For an overall account of Davidson's analysis of the action-expressions, I have also heavily relied on Evinne, *Donald Davidson*, pp. 87-90.
23. The way Davidson works out his theory of meaning in consonance with a theory of interpretation of actions is presented in many essays of Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) especially Essays 4, 9, 10, 13 and 15.
24. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, R. Rhees, and G.H. Von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984). All numerals used in connection with *PI* will refer to its sections, unless otherwise specified.
25. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, p. 12.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
28. Wittgenstein lays out the groundlessness of verbal rules in *PI* 185-242, and also in *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, ed. G. H. Von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), I-1-5, 13.
29. Davidson, *Essays on Events and Actions*, p. 98.
30. For Wittgenstein, the mental images, isolated from the vast corpus of verbal and non-verbal uses have no inherent semantic power. His arguments against the popular supposition about mental images are scattered all over his texts, of which one may mention *PI*, p.18, pp. 175-177, and sections 166, 370, 389 of the same text.
31. Davidson, *Essays on Events and Actions*, p. 98.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
33. Evinne, *Donald Davidson*, p. 57.
34. Strawson, 'On Referring'.
35. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, V- 45.
36. Wittgenstein's critique of ostension (outer and inner) traditionally claimed as foundational links between word and the world is presented in *PI*: 33, 85, 21, and 389. Also see his *The Blue and the Brown Books*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), p. 2.
37. Andrew Sneddon, 'Does Philosophy of Action rest on a Mistake?', *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (October 2001), pp. 502-522; See especially p. 512.
38. Wittgenstein's accounts of causation and the distinction between cause and reason is mainly contained in his article 'Cause and Effect: An Intuitive Awareness', *Philosophia*, Vol. 6, Nos. 3-4 (September-December 1976), pp. 409-425; *The Blue and the Brown Books*, p. 15; *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge: 1932-35*, ed. Alice Ambrose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Besides I have substantially relied upon H. J. Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 72-76 for his comprehensive account of causation.
39. *Ibid.*
40. The above illustration of cause and reason figures in Wittgenstein, *The Blue and the Brown Books*, p. 15.

41. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, p. 18.
42. Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures*, p. 40.
43. Severin Schroeder, 'Are Reasons Causes? A Wittgensteinian Response to Davidson' in Severin Schroeder (ed.), *Wittgenstein and the Contemporary Philosophy of Mind* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 166.
44. Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures*, p. 40.
45. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, III 42.
46. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).